

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (continued) - The Nature and purpose of Speaking in Tongues

Let's ask some basic questions: a) When someone speaks in tongues is the speaker in control, or is it an emotional outburst of ecstatic utterance? b) Is the speaker aware of what he or she is doing? c) Are these "tongues" actual human languages the speaker has never learned? d) Must they be actual languages to be genuine cases of spiritual utterance?

1) **SPEAKING IN TONGUES IS PRAYER AND PRAISE** - While there is a distinct difference in *purpose* between personal and congregational tongues (see last week's study), the *nature* of the utterance is the same. Paul sums up the nature of all utterance in tongues in **1 Corinthians 14:2** - "For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. See also **1 Corinthians 14:28** - "But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God." Notice that in the church, if there is no interpreter, the speaker is to speak "to himself and to God." Also, tongues, when interpreted, will be "giving thanks" - **1 Corinthians 14:16-17** - "Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? [17] For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up." This seems to fit in with the recognizable experience in **Acts 2:11**. We will come back to this important idea in point number 5.

2) **FOLLOWING THE INITIAL OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT AT PENTECOST (ACTS 2:11-12) THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT TONGUES WERE KNOWN LANGUAGES**. This also fits in with the Scriptural pattern. The sound of the "rushing wind" or the "tongues of fire" were also unique to the *very first outpouring of the Spirit*. Throughout the remainder of the testimony of the book of Acts and also in the Epistles, tongues are never again recognized as human languages. Yet Peter does not question the validity of the tongues of the *Caesareans* as a sign that they have indeed been filled with the Holy Spirit, just as the 120 were on the day of Pentecost - **Acts 10:44-47** - "While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. [45] And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. [46] For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, [47] "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" See also **11:15-18**. Nor does Paul question the sign of tongues in the Spirit baptism of the Ephesians - **Acts 19:5-7** - "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [6] And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. [7] There were about twelve men in all."

Later, Paul will teach quite emphatically that *without Divine intervention*, "no one understands" the person speaking in tongues - **1 Corinthians 14:2** - "For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit." But this does not cause Paul to question to *value* of speaking in tongues. He only questions the edifying value of the public *gift of tongues* when it is unaccompanied by the gift of *interpretation of tongues*. Also, as Paul's words imply, more than a human *translator* is needed. The Holy Spirit, Himself, must give the *interpretation*.

It is true that the word "tongues" can also be translated other "languages". But, as **1 Corinthians 13:1** makes clear, "other languages" can include more than other *human* languages (ie. "tongues of men and of angels").

3) **THE INTERPRETATION GIVES THE SIGNIFICANCE AND EXPLAINS THE ESSENCE OF THE SPEAKING IN TONGUES**. This is a very important point that is frequently missed. The word "interpretation" is the very same word used in **Luke 24:27** to describe how Jesus "explained" the Scriptures to the two on the road to Emmaus. Jesus wasn't *translating the whole Old Testament from one language to another*. Rather, He was making the point of those Scriptures clear to them. This is why the message in tongues and the interpretation can differ vastly in tone, length, style, etc. Interpretation is not a word for word translation of the speaking in tongues.

4) **BOTH PERSONAL AND CONGREGATIONAL TONGUES ARE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE SPEAKER** - The speaker chooses when to speak, when to stop, the volume, the tone, the speed, etc. In other words, tongues is not the result of an emotional outburst or a holy fit. They are prayer and praise and can be controlled just as those functions would be controlled in English. Paul makes at least some of these point clear in the instructions he gives in passages like **1 Corinthians 14:27-32** - "If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. [28] But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. [29] Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. [30] If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. [31] For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, [32] and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets."

5) **THE PURPOSE OF PERSONAL TONGUES IS PERSONAL PRAYER AND WORSHIP. THE PURPOSE OF CONGREGATIONAL TONGUES IS CORPORATE PRAYER AND WORSHIP**. Congregational tongues (the *gift* of tongues) with interpretation does *not* have the same purpose for the church body as the gift of prophecy. Tongues is speaking to God (**14:2**). Prophecy is God speaking to the church through the English words of the individual's choice.

See **1 Corinthians 14:5** - "Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up." There is a very common misconception here. This verse does *not* teach that tongues with interpretation is the *same* as prophecy. *It teaches that both are equally edifying for the congregation*. That does not make them the identical in *purpose*. They are different gifts with a different purpose.

- 6) **WHILE CONGREGATIONAL TONGUES AND PROPHECY HAVE DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS, BOTH ARE EQUALLY EDIFYING FOR THE CHURCH BECAUSE, IN DIFFERENT WAYS, BOTH INVOLVE A MESSAGE FOR THE CHURCH BODY.** Words can be directed to God and yet still contain a message for those who hear them.

Take for example, **Psalm 145:1-2** - "A Song of Praise. Of David. I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. [2] Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever." While the speaker addresses his words to God directly, they instruct and encourage a proper attitude for all of us to have toward our Creator. There is an important message there for all of us in those inspired words, even though they are directly addressed to God

So both tongues with interpretation and the gift of prophecy are equally edifying for the church body. Paul prefers prophecy because it involves only ***one*** gift, rather than the combination of ***two***, as is the case with tongues and interpretation. But he clearly endorses the edifying value of both when exercised properly - **1 Corinthians 14:1-5** - "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. [2] For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. [3] On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. [4] The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. [5] Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up."